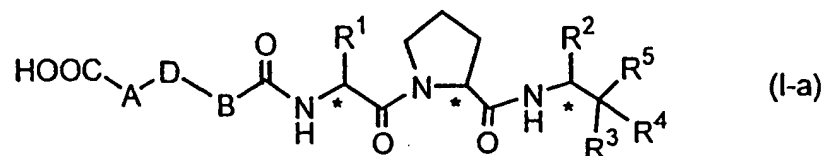


AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

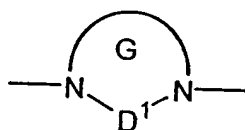
Claim 1 (previously presented): A heterocyclic compound of the formula (I-a):



wherein * means that the carbon atom marked with * is an asymmetric carbon atom,

A and B are the same or different and each is a lower alkylene group being optionally substituted by an oxo group,

D is a heteromonocyclic or heterobicyclic group of the following formula:



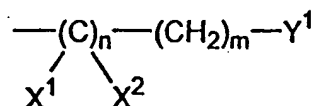
wherein D¹ is a methylene group or an ethylene group, and these groups may optionally be substituted by an oxo group, Ring G is a 5- to 14-membered, saturated or unsaturated, heteromonocyclic or heterobicyclic group optionally having other heteroatoms selected from a nitrogen atom, an oxygen atom and/or a sulfur atom, and said heteromonocyclic or heterobicyclic group being optionally substituted by a substituent T¹ in which T¹ is the same or different 1 to 3 groups selected from

- (i) an oxo group,
- (ii) a substituted or unsubstituted lower alkyl group,
- (iii) a substituted or unsubstituted amino group,
- (iv) a substituted or unsubstituted carbamoyl group,
- (v) a carboxyl group or a lower alkoxy carbonyl group,
- (vi) a phenyl group being optionally substituted by a halogen atom, a lower alkoxy group or a lower alkyl group, and
- (vii) a substituted or unsubstituted lower alkyl carbonyl group,

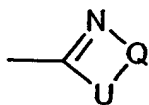
R¹ and R² are the same or different and each is a lower alkyl group,

R³ and R⁴ are different from each other, and each is a hydrogen atom or a hydroxy group, or both combine together to form an oxo group,

R⁵ is a group of the formula:



wherein X¹ and X² are a halogen atom, Y¹ is a hydrogen atom, a halogen atom, a lower alkoxy carbonyl group, a lower alkylaminocarbonyl group, an aralkylaminocarbonyl group, an aralkyloxy carbonyl group, a lower alkyl carbonyl group, or an aralkyl carbonyl group, or a group of the following formula:



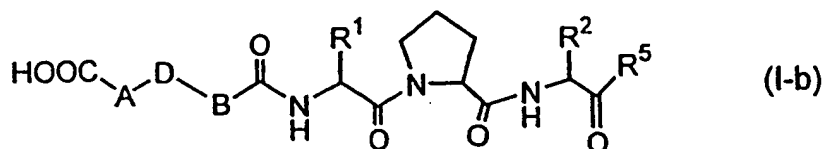
wherein U is an oxygen atom or a sulfur atom, Q is a vinylene group or an orthophenylene group being optionally substituted by T², T² is 1 to 3 groups selected from a halogen-substituted or unsubstituted lower alkyl group, a lower alkoxy group, a lower alkylsulfonyl group, a lower alkylcarbonyloxy group and an amino group being optionally substituted by a lower alkyl group,

n is 0, 1 or 2, and

m is an integer of 0 to 5,

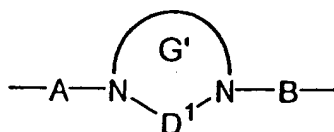
or its ester, or a salt thereof.

Claim 2 (original): The heterocyclic compound according to claim 1, which is a compound of the following formula (I-b):



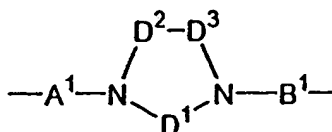
wherein A, B, D, R¹, R² and R⁵ are as defined in claim 1, or its ester, or a salt thereof.

Claim 3 (previously presented): The heterocyclic compound according to claim 1, wherein the group of the formula: -A-D-B- is a group of the following formula:



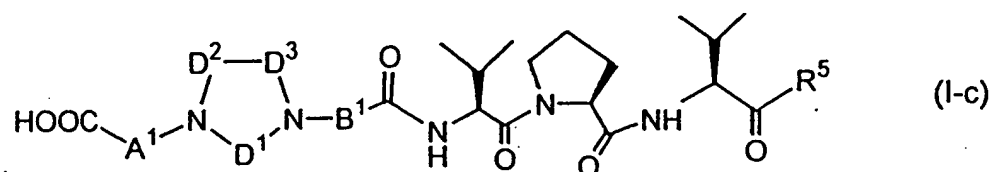
wherein A, B and D¹ are as defined in claim 1, Ring G¹ is a 5- to 9-membered, saturated or unsaturated heteromonocyclic group having optionally 1 to 3 of other heteroatom selected from a nitrogen atom, an oxygen atom and/or a sulfur atom, and said heteromonocyclic group may have 1 to 3 substituents T¹ which are as defined in claim 1, or its ester, or a salt thereof.

Claim 4 (previously presented): The heterocyclic compound according to claim 1, wherein the group of the formula: -A-D-B- is a group of the following formula:



wherein A¹ is a methylene group or a group of the formula: -CH₂CO-, B¹ is a methylene group or a group of the formula: -COCH₂-, D² and D³ are the same or different and each is a vinylene group optionally substituted by a lower alkyl group, or a methylene group optionally substituted by an oxo group or a lower alkyl group, D¹ is as defined in claim 1, provided that both D² and D³ are not simultaneously a vinylene group optionally substituted by a lower alkyl group, or its ester, or a salt thereof.

Claim 5 (original): The heterocyclic compound according to claim 4, which is a compound of the following formula (I-c):



wherein D¹ and R⁵ are as defined in claim 1, and A¹, B¹, D² and D³ are the same as defined in claim 4,

or its ester, or a salt thereof.

Claim 6 (currently amended): The heterocyclic compound according to claim 5, ~~which is~~ selected from the ~~following compounds, its ester, or a salt thereof~~ group consisting of:

~~Compound 1:~~ 2-(3-carboxymethyl-2-oxo-1-imidazolidinyl)acetyl-L-valyl-N-[(1S)-3,3,3-trifluoro-1-isopropyl-2-oxopropyl]-L-prolinamide;

~~Compound 2:~~ 2-(3-carboxymethyl-2,4-dioxo-1-pyrimidinyl)-acetyl-L-valyl-N-[(1S)-2-(2-benzoxazolyl)-1-isopropyl-2-oxoethyl]-L-prolinamide;

~~Compound 3:~~ 2-(4-carboxymethyl-2,3-dioxo-1-piperazinyl)acetyl-L-valyl-N-[(1S)-2-(2-benzoxazolyl)-1-isopropyl-2-oxoethyl]-L-prolinamide;

~~Compound 4:~~ 2-(3-carboxymethyl-2,4-dioxo-1-pyrimidinyl)-acetyl-L-valyl-N-[(1S)-3-benzylamino-1-isopropyl-2,3-dioxopropyl]-L-prolinamide,

~~Compound 5:~~ 2-(4-carboxymethyl-2,5-dioxo-1-piperazinyl)acetyl-L-valyl-N-[(1S)-2-(2-benzoxazolyl)-1-isopropyl-2-oxoethyl]-L-prolinamide;

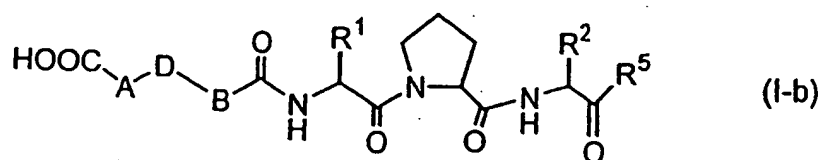
~~Compound 6:~~ 2-(3-carboxymethyl-2,5-dioxo-1-imidazolidinyl)-acetyl-L-valyl-N-[(1S)-3,3,3-trifluoro-1-isopropyl-2-oxopropyl]-L-prolinamide; and

~~Compound 7:~~ [[4-(2-carboxyacetyl)-1-piperazinyl]malonyl]-L-valyl-N-[(1S)-2-(2-benzoxazolyl)-1-isopropyl-2-oxoethyl]-L-prolinamide
or its ester, or a salt thereof.

Claim 7 (currently amended): A mixture comprising 90% or more of 2-(3-carboxymethyl-2-oxo-1-imidazolidinyl)acetyl-L-valyl-N-[(1S)-3,3,3-trifluoro-1-isopropyl-2-oxopropyl]-L-prolinamide (~~Compound 1~~), or a salt thereof, and the remaining % consisting substantially of a stereoisomer of 2-(3-carboxymethyl-2-oxo-1-imidazolidinyl)acetyl-L-valyl-N-[(1S)-3,3,3-trifluoro-1-isopropyl-2-oxopropyl]-L-prolinamide ~~Compound 1~~ or a salt thereof.

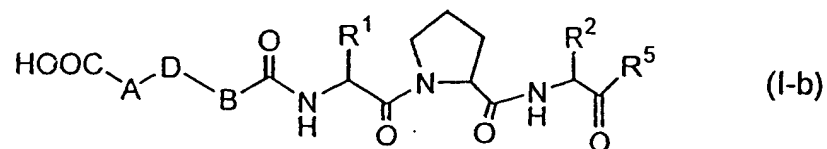
Claim 8 (cancelled)

Claim 9 (currently amended): A composition comprising a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier and a compound of the following formula (I-b):



wherein A, B, D, R¹, R² and R⁵ are as defined in claim 1, or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof in an amount effective to inhibit human neutrophil neutrophilic elastase.

Claim 10 (previously presented): A pharmaceutical composition comprising a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier and a compound of the following formula (I-b):



wherein A, B, D, R¹, R² and R⁵ are as defined in claim 1, or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof.